

Tamarack Chimney Fire Salvage Project PALS# 60727

Categorical Exclusion Framework

36 CFR 220.6(a)

Background The North Complex Fire began with a series of lightning strikes August 17, 2020. The Claremont Fire and Bear Fire located on the Plumas National Forest merged and on September 8, 2020 spotted across the Middle Fork Feather River, entered Butte County, and traveled some 30 miles that day. The North Complex Fire burned areas along the 22N94 and 22N27 roads in the Tamarack Flat area.

Tree mortality has occurred in areas of mixed and high fire severity. These fire-killed trees represent a roadside safety hazard and risk to forest visitors, will become dangerous fuels, and must be removed. In some stands, mortality approaches 100% and artificial reforestation efforts will be needed to bring them into compliance with forest plan objectives and NFMA reforestation requirements.

Stands are made up of mixed conifer species: ponderosa pine, white fir, incense cedar, sugar pine, Douglas fir, tan-oak, and black oak. The project includes the salvage of fire killed trees with an approximate volume of 6,000 MBF.

Proposed Project Location Tamarack Flat is located off 22N94 road, northwest of the Little Grass Valley Reservoir, within the Plumas National Forest in Plumas County.

Proposed Project Action and Description This project proposes to treat no more than 250 acres using conventional or mechanical tractor logging practices. To accomplish restoration, FRRD proposes to salvage cut, hand-cut-and-pile brush, burn brush piles, plant trees in the ground, masticate brush, prune resprouting oaks, dig fire-lines by hand, and hand-spray herbicides.

- Salvage Cut removing trees which are dead or dying because of injurious agents other than competition, to recover economic value that would otherwise be lost. Salvage will be conducted following designation by damage class. Follow marking guidelines for fire-injured trees in California (Smith and Cluck 2011). No sawlog diameter limits for salvage cut;
- Mastication any crushing, mowing, mulching, or other treatment that grinds or shreds vegetation (e.g., brush, fire killed trees) leaving resulting material on the forest floor;
- Herbicide treatments site preparation and release treatments by application of herbicides to control competing vegetation (target species would be primarily the shrub species ceanothus, manzanita, deer brush, Himalayan blackberry and other species as necessary). Herbicides would be limited to glyphosate and triclopyr using a targeted backpack sprayer and cut-and-daub methods to enhance the success of natural regeneration or regeneration on sites that will be replanted, in accordance with stream buffer and operating period restrictions in the management requirements table;
- Hand-Cut felling of trees and shrubs using chainsaws;
- Yarding removal of activity-generated slash and other fuels from the site by carrying or dragging;
- Piling of Fuels, Hand or Machine pile all activity generated slash and cover with

- waterproof covering for burning during winter months;
- Burning of Piled Material burning of piled material including hand and machine piles during winter months to remove hazardous fuels;
- Plant Trees the establishment or re-establishment of forest cover artificially by planting seedlings and/or cuttings, with or without site preparation;
- Prune the removal, close to the branch collar or flush with stem, of side branches and multiple leaders from oak (or other hardwood) resprouts;
- Tree Release and Weed treatment (mechanical or herbicide) designed to free young trees from undesirable, competing vegetation in stands not past sapling stage;
- Precommercial Thin the selective felling, deadening, or removal of trees from a young stand to maintain a specific stocking or stand density range;
- Dig Fire Lines by Hand hand-installation of a control line that is scraped or dug to mineral soil;
- Prescribed fire; activity where fire is applied to the majority or all of an area within well-defined boundaries for reduction of fuel hazard, as a resource management treatment, or both to achieve desired conditions;
- Maintenance hand cutting, hand- and/or grapple-piling, mastication, biomassing, targeted grazing, herbicide applications, and prescribed under-burning as needed on multiple entries over the next 30 to 40 years to maintain desired conditions.

The project will include road improvements and maintenance to existing roads.

Do the Proposed Actions fit within an established category? A proposed action may be categorically excluded from further analysis and documentation in an EIS or EA if the proposed action is within a category listed in 36 CFR 220.6(d) or (e).

Salvage logging to remove roadside hazards, remove fuels hazards, site prep for reforestation, and recover economic value along roads in the Tamarack Flat area. Salvage logging falls within the category found in 36 CFR 220.6(e)(13): **salvage of dead and/or dying trees not to exceed 250 acres**. Examples include but are not limited to harvest of fire damaged trees.

The Chief of the Forest Service and the Regional Forester have stressed that the safety of the public and our employees is our central concern. Within transportation corridors, hazard tree management is vital to everyone's safety. This area along roads is on ground generally less than 35% slopes; suffered near 100% mortality; needs site preparation for reforestation activities; can recover some economic value of the timber lost; fund other vital restoration work; and does not exceed 250 acres. The category found in 36 CFR 220.6(e)(13) is the best choice.

Are there extraordinary circumstances? If an agency determines that a categorical exclusion identified in its agency NEPA procedures covers a proposed action, the agency shall evaluate the action for extraordinary circumstances in which a normally excluded action may have a significant effect.

The mere presence of one or more of these resource conditions does not preclude use of a categorical exclusion. It is the degree of potential effect on resource conditions that determines whether extraordinary circumstances exist. 36 CFR 220.6(b)(2).